(c) No, Sir. The number of vacant posts, at present, are 24.

(d) and (e) Necessary action is being taken to fill-up these posts expeditiously in accordance with the prescribed procedure.

World-wide fund meet at Berlin

1616. SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether at a World-Wide Fund Meet held in Berlin in October last, it was observed that "the last great stronghold of tiger in India is under siege by rich men who grind its bones to make their bread"; and

(b) if so, the specific observations and suggestions for protecting and promoting the tiger population in India made thereat and the aid offered or earmarked by the World-Wide Fund or its members for the purpose?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT & FORESTS (CAPT JAI NARAIN PRASAD NISHAD): (a) No such observation was made at the WWF Annual Conference held in Berlin during October 21-25, 1996.

(b) The agenda for the above mentioned conference did not specifically include a discussion on the tiger situation in India. However, separate informal discussions did take place in which serious concern about the status of the tiger in India was expressed by several participants and the need for urgent action to address the situation was emphasised. Willingness to provide financial assistance was also expressed but no specific amount was earmarked or committed.

Coconut Plantations Affected by root Wilt disease

1617. SHRI YERRA NARAYANA-SWAMY: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that root wilt disease has affected coconut plantations in Kerala and other parts of the country;

(b) whether it is also a fact that the root wilt disease has also been traced in Andhra Pradesh; and

(c) if so, whether ICAR is planning any steps to control this disease?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI CHATURANAN MISHRA): (a) The root wilt disease has affected coconut plantations in Kerala and some adjoining parts of Tamil Nadu.

(b) No such report has been received.

(c) the strategy developed by ICAR's Central Planatation Crops Research Institutes, Kasargod (Kerala) consists of systematic eradication of all palms in the advanced stage of disease and palms infected prior to flowering. Attempts are also being made to develop resistant/tolerant lines by identifying disease free palms in 'hot-spot' areas and utilising them in the breeding programme. Some F1 hydrids of coconut have shown field tolerance since last four years in 'hot-spots'.

New Strategy for Crop Production in 8th Plan

1618 SHRI RAHASBIHARI BARIK: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have adopted any new strategy during the Eighth Plan to increase crop production;

(b) if so, the crop production exepcted to be achieved on implementation of these new strategies;

(c) the progress as on date; and

(d) the details of the new strategies?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI CHATURANAN MISHRA): (a) During the 8th Five Year Plan, a Cropping System Approach has been adopted for increasing the productivity of cereal crops.